

A Hold Up

By ROSS TRAME

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The Overland Limited was speeding east across New Mexico toward the Texas boundary line. The fine alkali dust of the high plains sifted through every crevice in the car, smarting and irritating the throats and noses of passengers. Miss Mary Appleton was one of the few who had not grumbled at the dust, heat, lack of mirages or slowness of the service. Presumably her time was too fully occupied. The Mayne children, her three nephews, demanded her complete attention.

When Major Mayne of the United States army was ordered to the Philippines, his wife elected to go with him. The children were easily disposed of by their little buttery of a mother. "We'll send them east. I'll telegraph Mary to come out and take them back. It will be a nice trip for her, poor thing."

So the "poor thing," who was Mrs. Mayne's elder half sister, the Cinderella of the household, age reversed, left her invalid stepmother behind and journeyed to San Francisco—for her charges.

"We'll try and make it pleasant for you while you are with us," Mrs. Mayne had coaxed to her upon her arrival, but the irresponsible little lady had left all packing and house clearing arrangements until the last minute, and it took all of Mary's time and sound sense to evolve order out of confusion. Finally all the boxes were corded, the major and his wife off to the transport, and Miss Appleton, with her three rebellious charges, seated in the train for their long ride to the Atlantic coast.

One section had been provided for her and the three boys, Bobbie, Tom and Grover, kids of twelve, nine and six. They were hearty, healthy young animals, who regarded the commands of their gentle, mild tempered aunt in the light of a perpetual joke. The Pullman was crowded, and their fellow traveler looked with manifest disfavor upon the noisy, ill behaved boys.

Their section was nearest the drawing room, and Miss Appleton occasionally caught glimpses of the tall stern looking man with iron gray hair. He seemed to be always busy, either reading or writing, and her tender conscience prompted the hope that he might be too much absorbed in his work to be disturbed by the proximity of her nephews. She had noticed his critical, disapproving glances at her flock in the dining car, and once she detected a smile on his face when she had made ineffectual efforts to curb them.

It was the fourth day of the journey and a particularly hard one. Bob and Tom had joined forces and teased Grover, who was quick tempered, into such a fury of passion that he had sobbed himself asleep on his aunt's knee. She sat in a cramped, uncomfortable position, holding the little teary faced boy against her shoulder.

The man in the drawing room looked at her for a moment, then stepped out and said quietly: "Let me take your little boy. He can rest very comfortably on my sofa." Sutting the action to the words, he carried the sleeping child to the couch and set the door ajar.

Miss Appleton's lips trembled, and it was with difficulty that she kept back the tears. It was almost the first kindly words spoken to those hard and disagreeable days. There had been admonitions in regard to the boys being left behind at stations and tanks or breaking their necks from windows and platforms. There had been many complaints in respect to their noise and requests that they be kept strictly to their own seats, but this was the first kindly interest manifested. The weary, nervous woman looked out steadily over the uninviting landscape so that the tears hung heavy on her lashes might remain undetected.

The occupant of the drawing room missed nothing of what was going on. His heart gave an unaccustomed throb as he remembered the mute gratitude expressed by her dark eyes when he carried off the sleeping boy. It was a strange and by no means unpleasant sensation.

Bob and Tom sat in a virtuous armed truce. Bob's black eyes snapped as he related to Tom in subdued tones the "Adventures of Snake Eyed Sol, the Terror of the Western Plains." "If we could only get off this blamed train, we would be sure to find lots of Indians and gold and wild horses. We'd have a great time. But there's no use in trying. Aunt Mary has the porter on to us." The boy looked decidedly wicked as he thought of his lost opportunity. The man within caught the look and a vision of the aunt's sweet face at the same time. "If I had the man agent of you, my lad, I would bring you up with a round turn," he thought.

Miss Appleton smothered a sigh and leaned back on the luxurious cushions. Her few days of more intimate acquaintance with Master Bob had made her fully aware of the consequences likely to follow from an interruption of the narrative. The comparative peace and repose were provocative of sleep. She was awakened from a doze by a brisk official voice demanding, "Your papers, please?"

"Do you mean our tickets?" "No, madam. I have nothing to do with the tickets. I want your quarantine passport. We are near the Texas boundary line."

"But—we have no papers except our tickets. We have no passports."

"Very sorry, madam; very sorry, but you'll have to get off before you come to the Texas boundary."

"Get off—why?" she gasped. "Orders, madam. The state of Texas orders that no passengers from San Francisco cross the boundary line without a quarantine passport. You're right from there, and you've surely heard of the report that bubonic plague is in Chinatown."

"I heard nothing of it," she rejoined. "Well, that may be. However, I am here to see that the Texas quarantine laws are obeyed." The conductor came up and joined in the conversation. "It's great pity that you didn't look after this when you bought your tickets. The railway officials in San Francisco would have issued your certificate. It's a wonder that they didn't speak to you about it."

Mrs. Mayne had bought the tickets, and Mary remembered with a sinking heart that her sister had carelessly tossed aside a package of papers when she took the tickets from the envelope. The conductor went on. "This bubonic plague scare is a confounded nuisance to the traveling public. There is one way out of it; you can make oath that you have not been in Chinatown or the precincts within fifteen days."

"We can easily do that."

It is the unexpected that happens, and Bob's opportunity had come. "I was in Chinatown last week with Mike," he said loudly.

Miss Appleton looked at him in amazement. Mike was the major's old and trusted servant, the last person to take the boy into a place of danger. The story was incredible.

Bob looked unabashedly at his aunt. To Bob at that moment there were things better than truth. The officer looked down sternly at the little shrinking woman. "You'll have to be ready to get off at the next siding. You'll find a box car there. The local freight will pick you up later and take you to Deming. There you will find out what it is best to do."

The sympathetic excitement of their fellow passengers was subdued by the thought of relief from the troublesome boys and by nervous fear of journeying with a plague suspect. The friendly gentleman lent a hand in strapping valises and in gathering up the various impediments of an overland journey. There was evidently on his part no intention of questioning the wisdom of the laws of Texas.

Miss Appleton's patience received the crowning stroke when she mounted her trunk as a step and was dragged by a not overclean employee into the box car. She had hardly until then realized the significance of their movements. She had but a confused idea of the goodbyes of their fellow passengers generally, but the sympathetic tones of the friendly man persisted in her mind.

Bob scrambled up beside her and announced his freedom in a hilarious whoop. It was adding insult to injury, and, as much to her own amazement as to Bob's, she seized the offender by the shoulders and shook him soundly. The crestfallen appearance of their ringleader as he sulked on a box in the corner of the car, a new, stern aunt who certainly held the whip hand, and strong desire for something to eat were conditions not conducive to free and easy romance in the desert. It was a very weary and subdued trio of boys that the local freight brought into Deming.

Miss Appleton's apprehensions that the whole party would be subject to an unpleasant quarantine were speedily removed. Before she had recovered from the surprise at the courtesy shown them by the railway officials, their fellow traveler of the Overland stepped from the caboose of the freight.

"I telephoned to see that you were properly looked after, and I have come to see that it is done," he said with a smile. "I know this place very well, as I happen to be in the railroad business myself. You will be very comfortable here for a few days, until you get your passports."

Much to Miss Appleton's relief he assumed, with a matter of fact air, the entire management of their affairs. He did the telephoning, the planning and the thousand and one duties demanded by their quarantine hold up. Once she ventured an apologetic remonstrance about taking up his time, but he had answered gayly that he was "off on a holiday," and that he was enjoying it immensely (which was strictly true).

Bob was the only unhappy member of the party. Pride forbade an acknowledgment of his falsehood, and he grimly accepted his punishment. He tasted the way of the transgressor in a lonely quarantine, and also realized the power of the government of Texas to punish not only visitors to Chinatown, but also those who inadvertently stray in the paths of Anasias.

A number of cablegrams were awaiting the Maynes on their arrival at Manila. Mrs. Mayne nearly fainted with astonishment at the contents of one which her husband read aloud:

"Mary married yesterday to Robert Read, general manager Great Western railroad."

Fortified Rectories.
In an article on "Historical Houses" in the House a writer calls attention to a curious relic of the days when the Northumbrian pastor was compelled to live in a fortified house if he wished to preserve his worldly goods from the plundering bands of moss troopers who were continually crossing the Scottish border and raiding the homesteads of defenseless villagers. One of the best examples of these fortified rectories, originally built in the fourteenth century, still exists in Rothbury. It is described in a list of fortlets in 1542 as a "toure and a little barmkin, being the maneroun of the psonage of Rothbury."

It has walls eleven feet thick at the base and six feet at the top. It has turrets at the corners, and a chamber with a stone door, into which the rectors drove their cattle at night on approach of the raiders.

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